



Defence pact with Turkiye, Saudi awaits final approval

• Defence Production Minister Harraj reveals proposal prepared after ‘year of talks’ • Says this agreement is separate from Pak-Saudi defence deal • Finalisation depends on consensus from all three states • Turkiye confirms talks held, but no agreement signed so far

KARACHI: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye have prepared a draft defence agreement after nearly a year of talks, Defence Production Minister Raza Hayat Harraj confirmed on Wednesday.

His remarks followed comments by Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, who said discussions had taken place but no agreement had been signed.

Speaking to *Reuters*, Mr Harraj said the proposed trilateral arrangement was separate from the bilateral Pakistan-Saudi agreement announced last year and would require consensus among the three countries before it could be finalised.

“The Pakistan-Saudi Arabia-Turkiye trilateral agreement is something that is already in the pipeline,” Mr Harraj told the news agency in an interview. “The draft agreement is already available with us. The draft agreement is already with Saudi Arabia. The draft agreement is already available with Turkiye. And all three countries are deliberating. And this agreement has been there for the last 10 months.”

Meanwhile, asked at a press conference in Istanbul earlier on Thursday about media reports on

negotiations between the three sides, Mr Fidan said talks had been held but that no agreement had been signed.

The Turkish foreign minister pointed to a need for broader regional cooperation and trust to overcome distrust, which he said created “cracks and problems” that led to the emergence of external hegemonies or wars and instability stemming from terrorism in the region.

“At the end of all of these, we have a proposal like this: all regional nations must come together to create a cooperation platform on the issue of security,” Mr Fidan said.

Regional issues could be resolved if relevant countries would “be sure of each other,” he added. “At the moment, there are meetings, talks, but we have not signed any agreement. Our President (Tayyip Erdogan)’s vision is for an inclusive platform that creates wider, bigger cooperation and stability,” Mr Fidan said, without naming Pakistan or Saudi Arabia directly.

Bloomberg, citing people familiar with the matter, reported last

Continued on Page 5



A VIEW of the Karakoram Highway in Gulmit, Gojal, after light snowfall in the area.—Jamil Nagri

Temperatures to plunge as wet spell starts today

NDMA says ‘strong cold wave’ likely to affect GB, KP and Azad Kashmir

By Aamir Yasin

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) on Thursday predicted rain and snowfall in the upper parts of the country from today, while the central and southern regions would receive rain and snow from January 20 to 23, as the authorities issued advisories asking tourists to take precautions during the forecast period.

According to the Met office, a shallow westerly wave is likely to approach the upper parts of the country from January 16 and may persist till January 19, and is likely to strengthen from January 20 and grip most parts of the country from January 21.

Rain and snowfall are expected in Gilgit-Baltistan’s Diamir, Astore, Ghizer, Skardu, Hunza, Gilgit, Ghanche, Shigar; Kashmir’s Neelum Valley, Muzaffarabad, Poonch, Hattian, Bagh, Haveli; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Chitral, Dir, Swat, Kalam, Shangla, Kohistan, Battagram, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, and Buner districts from January 16 (evening/night) to

Continued on Page 5



MINNEAPOLIS: A protester tries to shield themselves as ICE agents fire munitions and pepper balls. Tensions are high in the state of Minnesota, with another shooting involving ICE triggering more anger.—Reuters

Report on Page 10

Pakistan engaged with US on visa curbs, Iran tariff: FO

• Islamabad hopes ‘routine processing’ of immigrant visas will resume soon • Insists Pakistan-Iran trade complies with international law, regulations • Offers to facilitate Tehran-Washington communication to ease tensions

By Baqir Sajjad Syed

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office said on Thursday it was in contact with the United States over a freeze on immigrant visa processing, including for Pakistanis, and President Donald Trump’s announcement of tariffs on countries trading with Iran, while also indicating Islamabad’s readiness to help facilitate communication between Tehran and Washington to defuse tensions.

Speaking at the weekly media briefing, Foreign Office spokesman Tahir Andrabi said Pakistan was seeking clarity from US authorities after comments from the State Department suggested an internal review of immigrant visa processing.

He said Pakistan was “in touch with the US authorities to ascertain further details” as the matter was still evolving.

The spokesman said Pakistan understood the move as part of an internal review of US immigration

policies and expressed hope that “routine processing of immigrant visas will resume soon”.

His comments came after the US Department of State announced an indefinite suspension of immigrant visa processing for nationals of 75 countries, including Pakistan, effective Jan 21.

Applicants from Pakistan will still be interviewed: Page 12

The decision applies to immigrant visas only and is part of a review under US public charge provisions. The move has raised concerns about delays in family reunification and employment-based immigration.

On trade matters, Mr Andrabi said Pakistan had taken note of the announcement on imposing tariffs on countries conducting trade with Iran and remained engaged with Washington on the issue.

“As regards our trade with Iran, it follows international trade regula-

tions and relevant international law,” he said, adding that Pakistan would continue to engage both the US and Iran on its trade relations.

Earlier this week, President Trump announced the imposition of a 25 per cent tariff on countries doing business with Iran, framing the move as part of stepped-up pressure on Tehran amid its crackdown on protests and tensions with Washington.

Responding to a question on Pakistan’s possible role in US-Iran relations, Mr Andrabi recalled Islamabad’s involvement during last year’s nuclear-related talks. He said Pakistan had adopted a “very positive and principled position” that allowed it to act as a bridge builder and facilitator for communication channels.

He noted that during those talks, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar held multiple telephone conversations with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Iranian

Continued on Page 5

Taliban leader’s speech lays bare ‘Kandahar vs Kabul’ divide

• Report claims Hibatullah Akhundzada ‘spooked’ by possibility of schism between his hardline base in the south, more pragmatic ministers in the capital • Zabihullah Mujahid ‘confirms’ existence of audio recording, but terms *BBC* claim ‘unfounded’

Monitoring Desk

A STARK message from the Taliban supreme leader, warning of internal threats to the Islamic Emirate, has seemingly laid bare the long-suspected divide between Kandahar and Kabul, *BBC News* reported.

An audio recording of a speech — delivered by Hibatullah Akhundzada at a seminary in Kandahar around a year ago — contains what some are interpreting as confirmation of differences among top Taliban leaders.

In the leaked clip, obtained by the BBC,

Akhundzada can be heard saying that internal disagreements could eventually bring them all down.

According to the investigation by *BBC Afghan*, two distinct groups have emerged within the Afghan Taliban, each presenting competing visions for how Afghanistan should be governed.

One is entirely loyal to the Akhundzada-led Kandahar faction, who is driving the country towards his vision of a strict Islamic Emirate — isolated from the modern world, where religious figures loyal to him control every aspect of society.

The second faction is made up of powerful Taliban

members largely based in the capital Kabul, advocating for an Afghanistan which — while still following a strict interpretation of Islam — engages with the outside world, builds the country’s economy, and even allows girls and women access to an education they are currently denied beyond primary school.

The question was always whether the Kabul group — made up of Taliban cabinet ministers, powerful militants and influential religious scholars commanding the support of thousands of Taliban loyalists — would ever challenge Akhundzada in any meaningful way, as

his speech suggested.

Then came a decision which would see the delicate tug of war between the most powerful men in the country escalate into a clash of wills.

In late September, Akhundzada ordered the internet and phones to be shut off, severing Afghanistan from the rest of the world. But just three days later the internet was back, with no explanation of why.

What had happened behind the scenes was seismic, insiders said. It was thought that the Kabul group had acted against Akhundzada’s order and

Continued on Page 5

15 terrorists gunned down in KP: ISPR

Bureau Report

PESHAWAR: At least 15 terrorists, including two armed suspects who were killed in an encounter with the police, were gunned down in different operations across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said 13 members of the “Indian proxy Fitna-al-Khawarij” — the state’s term for the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan — were killed in two separate engagements on January 13 and 14.

In Bannu, the security forces effectively engaged the militants’ location and gunned down eight militants following an intense exchange of fire.

The statement read that another intelligence-based operation was conducted by the troops in Kurram, adding that five terrorists were killed in that operation.

Meanwhile, two armed militants were killed and a policeman was injured in a shootout between the police and the militants in Dera Ismail Khan on Thursday.

According to a police spokesperson, the clash took place when the militants attacked the Khutti police check-post located within the limits of Dera Town police station on Wednesday night, triggering a fierce exchange of fire that left two attackers dead and a police constable injured.

Despite record militant deaths, Pakistan saw a sharp escalation in militant violence in 2025, with terrorist attacks rising by 34 per cent and

Continued on Page 11

ON OTHER PAGES



Petroleum levy on petrol, diesel hiked

The government on Thursday kept the prices of petrol and high-speed diesel unchanged, but increased the petroleum levy on both products. According to a Petroleum Division press release, the price of petrol will remain at Rs253.17 per litre and that of HSD at Rs257.08 for the upcoming fortnight. The petroleum levy was increased by Rs4.65 on petrol and by 80 paise on diesel. **Page 3**



Passport ranking improves

Pakistan’s passport ranking has improved on the Henley Index, rising from 103 in 2025 to 98 this year. According to the latest rankings, Pakistan’s travel document was placed 98th on the list, improving by five places and tying with Yemen. The index ranked Pakistan above Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. Singapore topped the index, followed by Japan and South Korea. **Page 12**

Trump sheathes his sabre in standoff with Iran

• US president adopts ‘wait-and-see’ stance; expresses lack of confidence in Pahlavi • Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman led ‘frantic’ midnight diplomacy to avert US military strikes • Tehran envoy says situation ‘back to normal’; deepfake videos flood social media • UNSC holds emergency session; G7 nations condemn crackdown

WASHINGTON / ISLAM-ABAD: US President Donald Trump on Thursday changed his stance on military intervention in Iran, adopting a “wait it and see” posture instead, after receiving information that killings in Iran’s crackdown on protesters were easing, and there was no current threat for mass executions.

He cited assurances from “very important sources on the other side” indicating that Tehran had ceased using lethal force against demonstrators.

“They’ve said the killing has stopped and the executions won’t take place,” Trump said. Asked by a reporter if US

military action was now off the table, the president replied: “We’re going to watch it and see what the process is.”

The comments calmed markets, leading oil prices to retreat from multi-month highs. Trump noted his administration had received a “very good statement” from Iran, adding that “hopefully, it will continue.”

This diplomatic pivot coincided with reports from rights groups and Iranian state media that imminent executions had been halted. Iranian state media reported on Thursday that Erfan Soltani, a 26-year-old man arrested during protests in Karaj, would



TEHRAN: People walk past closed shops in the Grand Bazaar, following days of protests.—Reuters

not be sentenced to death.

A rights group, which had previously reported Soltani was scheduled for execution Wednesday, confirmed the order had been postponed. In a social media post, Trump responded to the news regarding Soltani, writing: “This is good news.”

Iranian officials also moved to reinforce the de-escalation. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told *Fox News* there would be “no hanging today or tomorrow.”

Araghchi claimed the government was “in full control” and reported an atmosphere of “calm” following what he described as three days of

“terrorist operations.” He alleged the protests, which began over economic grievances, were infiltrated by external elements hoping to provoke a US war.

This stance was repeated by Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Reza Amiri Moghadam, who claimed on Thursday that the situation was now fully under control and there were no protests in Iran.

Speaking during a visit to the National Rahmatul-lil-Alameen Authority, Moghadam said that he received information at around 1am on Thursday, indicating that

Continued on Page 11